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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000266

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV; PACOM FOR FPA

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TAGS: PREL PGOV BM RP

SUBJECT: BURMA: PM SOE WIN GETS BLUNT ADVICE FROM FILIPINO PRESIDENT

REF: A. 04 RANGOON 249

B. MANILA 655

C. 04 MANILA 5529

D. JAKARTA 2275

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Burmese regime's new Prime Minister, Soe Win, recently visited Manila and, as we've heard it, received a friendly though fairly blunt message from President Arroyo: the international community expects a timetable for the regime's road map; the process will not be accepted without ASSK's participation; and the Philippines has made progress with the help of the UN, so the Burmese regime should follow suit and let the UN Special Envoy do his job in Burma. Assuming that the read-out we received was accurate, it strikes us as quite helpful that President Arroyo delivered a blunt political message to Soe Win. However, the PM has not emerged as a key player within the regime and he is unlikely to deliver the entire message to the top generals. Furthermore, a collective, most certainly watered-down, ASEAN message to the SPDC on these issues will be more palatable to the generals. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Prime Minister Lt Gen Soe Win, leading his first state visit, traveled to the Philippines February 20-21 where he met with President Arroyo, other GRP officials, and leading members of the Filipino Congress. PM Soe Win led a 27-member delegation that included four senior GOB ministers and five directors general. Official Burmese state media characteristically portrayed the visit as a grand success, emphasizing a "close and friendly relationship" that has existed since the two countries established relations in 1956.

¶3. (C) The Philippines Ambassador to Burma, Phoebe Gomez, was in Manila for the duration of the visit and participated in all of Soe Win's substantive meetings. Gomez told the COM on February 28 that although the GOP accorded Soe Win head of government honors, President Arroyo was "forthright" in their bilateral meeting, telling the Burmese PM that "the world is asking for a timetable (for the regime's road map) and "the international community wants full participation (in the National Convention)."

¶4. (C) According to Gomez, President Arroyo also noted to Soe Win that democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi (ASSK) could not be considered as capable of participating in the constitutional drafting process while she remains under detention, alluding to the notion that the SPDC's road map could not be viewed as inclusive. Arroyo offered the Philippines experience as an example for the Burmese to consider: the GRP, she said, has achieved a peace agreement with the MNLF (Moro National Liberation Front), but only did so with the involvement of the UN and the support of the international community. "It would be helpful," Arroyo said, "if you accept UN Special Envoy Razali." (Note: The SPDC has not permitted Razali to visit Burma since March 2004. End Note).

¶5. (C) PM Soe Win, according to Amb. Gomez, told President Arroyo that the regime's road map was at a "delicate stage" and the GOB's top priority is to complete unification of Burma's 100-plus ethnic groups. "We have a tough task in achieving a consensus at the ongoing National Convention," Soe Win said, "this is not easy to explain to the outside world and that is why we can't have a specific timetable." The PM offered a standard regime line that ASSK and the NLD had "boycotted" the Convention and added that "if she (ASSK) opposes our efforts, it will be difficult to achieve our objective of national unity."

¶6. (C) In a follow-on expanded meeting, President Arroyo told PM Soe Win that she had an obligation to be responsive to her parliament, NGOs, and other domestic pressure groups in explaining the GRP's role in ASEAN's constructive engagement policy toward Burma. She observed that a meaningful dialogue between the SPDC and the democratic opposition should be part of this policy. Soe Win claimed that there was momentum for economic and political progress in Burma, but added that "we will have to bear all pressures that may arise, because we are committed first and foremost to achieving our own objectives."

17. (SBU) Amb. Gomez also told the COM that during the Soe Win visit she, Gomez, had talked with Senator Santiago, Chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, who had "just that morning" tabled a resolution asking the GRP to oppose the ASEAN chair moving to Burma in 2006 (ref B). Gomez said that President Arroyo would probably "do what is proper" and communicate to the SPDC at some point that "segments of Filipino society" have concerns about this issue, but observed that the Burmese would not be responsive. She added that the GRP would not be very proactive on blocking Burma from taking the chair, given that the Philippines will itself assume the chair in 2007.

Comment: Great (Filipino) Taste, Less (ASEAN) Filling

18. (C) PM Soe Win has, since assuming office last October, played only a supporting role to the SPDC's top generals, a clear downgrading of the job since the ouster of his predecessor, Khin Nyunt. Interestingly, Soe Win and his delegation flew to Manila in a GOB-procured turbo prop plane, not the standard jet accorded to senior-level SPDC officials.

As a result, the trip took over nine hours (instead of three hours) and, according to Amb. Gomez, the delegation members arrived fatigued, adding to their apprehension at the prospects of possible anti-SPDC demonstrators in Manila.

19. (C) Amb. Gomez said that a terrorism high-alert in Manila precluded any "troubles" and observed that Soe Win was jovial and confident by the end of the visit. Nonetheless, assuming that Gomez's read-out was accurate, it strikes us as quite helpful that President Arroyo delivered a blunt political message to Soe Win on ASSK, the National Convention, and the regime's road map -- quite likely a result of Embassy Manila's recent efforts to urge the GRP to press the SPDC on these issues (ref B). However, Soe Win is unlikely to deliver the entire message to SPDC head honchos Than Shwe and Maung Aye. Furthermore, a collective, most certainly watered-down, ASEAN message to the SPDC on the road map will be more palatable to the generals. End Comment.

10. (U) This message was coordinated with Embassy Manila.  
Martinez